

SCHINDLER'S LIST

US, 1993, d.. Steven Spielberg



As the Jews in Krakow are being driven into the ghetto, Czech businessman, Oskar Schindler persuades the military, with charm and bribes, to allow him to manufacture pots and pans, bringing great profit to himself and to them. He seeks out accountant Itzhak Stern to manage his factory. Schindler employs the Jews, enabling them to leave the ghetto for work. He himself lives a life of luxury.

Krakow commandant Amon Goeth he is cruel and arbitrary in killing prisoners. He oversees the destruction of the ghetto and the transfer of all Jews to the local labour camp. Schindler's factory continues to thrive. However, Schindler has witnessed the cruelty of the liquidation of the ghetto. When he realises that his workers are destined for the camps, he does a deal with Goeth to buy them to work in a new factory in Czechoslovakia. He compiles a list of people to be saved. The men arrive at their destination but the train with the women goes to Auschwitz. Schindler rescues them.

The factory makes munitions during the war's final months but Schindler makes sure they are unusable. As the war ends, he lets the workers go as well as the German soldiers. He is a criminal because he is a profiteer. The workers give him letters of recommendation and a gold ring. He regrets he did not save more Jews. In modern Israel, the Schindler survivors and the actors portraying them place memorial stones on Schindler's grave.

With Schindler's List, Steven Spielberg combined his considerable cinema talents with his acknowledgement of his Jewish past. In the years following, he sponsored a video library of interviews with Holocaust survivors. While feted for his entertainments like the Indiana Jones trilogy, ET and the Jurassic Park movies, Spielberg has always shown a serious side to his movie-making: Duel, The Color Purple, Empire of the Sun, Saving Private Ryan, Amistad and Minority Report. The movie won Oscars for Best Film, Director, Screenplay (from Australian Thomas Keneally's Booker-winning novel, Schindler's Ark), Cinematography and Musical Score.

Screenwriter Steven Zaillian (Searching for Bobby Fischer, A Civil Action) has been able to write a powerful Holocaust story, an insightful overview of the war in Central Europe and a gallery of forceful characters which the cast bring persuasively to life. Liam Neeson has the role of a lifetime as Schindler. He is convincing as the eager wheeler-dealer and as the man who undergoes a deep conversion. Ben Kingsley is intelligent and repressed as Stern. Ralph Fiennes gives a tour-de-force portrayal of all that was evil in Nazi superiority and cruelty.

The black and white photography makes the Holocaust more visually graphic than colour. However, the colour for the initial candle being lit and extinguished as the smoke curls up anticipating the chimney smoke, for the little girl with the red coat, and for the final tribute to Schindler in Israel is fitting. Schindler's List is already a cinema classic.

